

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-02

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-02 /005 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: AF/C:DLCARDWELL

APPROVED BY: AF/C:TRBUCHANAN

EUR/CE:KAKURZE

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O 081748Z DEC 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE STATE 298379

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO KHARTOUM KINSHASA LIBREVILLE
NDJAMENA PARIS YAOUNDE FROM BANGUI DTD 04 DEC 1976

REF STATE 298378

QTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BANGUI 2329

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CT

SUBJ: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC BECOMES AN EMPIRE

SUMMARY: THE LONG-RUMORED PROCLAMATION OF AN EMPIRE, WITH PRESIDENT BOKASSA AS EMPEROR, OCCURRED DECEMBER 4. THE NEW CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR REVIVAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IT WAS PRESENTED AS LIBERALIZING ACTION. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS A PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE CONGRATULATING BOKASSA ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE PRESENCE OF ZAIRIAN PRESIDENT MOBUTU, THE GOVERNMENT, DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND PARTY FAITHFUL, THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE MONTH-LONG MESAN PARTY CONGRESS DECEMBER 4 PUT AN END TO THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED LAST SEPTEMBER, AND WITH THE PROCLAMATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION TRANSFORMED THE COUNTRY

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FROM A REPUBLIC TO AND EMPIRE WITH PRESIDENT BOKASSA BECOMING EMPEROR BOKASSA I. THE ANNOUNCEMENT STRESSED THAT BOKASSA WAS GIVING UP THE ABSOLUTE POWER HE TOOK FOLLOWING HIS COUP AT THE BEGINNING OF 1966 IN FAVOR OF A REVIVED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

AND CONSTITUTIONALLY EMPOWERED EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES.

2. THE NEW CONSITUTION LEAVES BOKASSA IN COMPLETE CONTROL BUT PROVIDES MORE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE TO WHAT HAD BEEN UNTIL VERY RECENTLY AN EXTREMELY CENTRALIZED, ONE-MAN GOVERNMENT. THE ELECTED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL HAVE THE POWER TO CONSIDER, AMEND AND BLOCK LEGISLATION. THE PRIME MINISTER, ALTHOUGH NAMED BY THE EMPEROR, CAN BE CENSURED BY THE ASSEMBLY, IN WHICH CASE THE EMPEROR WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE WHEHTER TO DISSOLVE THE ASSEMBLY OR DISMISS THE PRIME MINISTER OR BOTH. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL PRESIDE OVER THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

3. THE CONSTITUTION CONTAINS A BILL OF RIGHTS, AND PROVIDES FOR PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUALS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND AN END TO CENSORSHIP. THE EMPEROR IS DESCRIBED AS THE SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY AND THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES.

4. COMMENT: IN MANY WAYS THE NEW CONSTITUTION FORMALIZES WHAT HAD BEEN THE DEFACTO SITUATION. BOKASSA HAS BEEN ACTING INCREASINGLY LIKE A MONARCH, AND HE BEGAN WITH THE GOVERNMENTAL REORGANIZATION OF SEPTEMBER TO GIVE GREATER EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY TO HIS PRIME MINISTER. WE DOUBT THAT, INITIALLY AT LEAST, IT WILL MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, THERE IS NOW THE FIRST TIME IN TEN YEARS A CONSTITUTION. ALSO, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD BECOME A VEHICLE FOR INTRODUCING GREATER OPENNESS IN THE SOCIETY SHOULD BOKASSA WISH TO MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION. THE BILL OF RIGHTS, IF IMPLEMENTED, WOULD MARK A MAJOR LIBERALIZATION OF THE REGIME.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: BOKASSA WILL CERTAINLY RECEIVE CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES FROM A GREAT MANY HEADS OF STATE, INCLUDING ALMOST CERTAINLY THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE AND THE LEADERS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES. WE WOULD RECOMMEND A LOW-KEY MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT CONGUATULATING BOKASSA ON BECOMING EMPEROR AND WELCOMING THE CREATION OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY. WE WILL FURTHER ANALYZE THE NEW GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM AS TEXTS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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DOCUMENTS BECOME AVAILABLE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 16 SEP 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENT, ELECTION CANDIDATES, INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE298379
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AF/C:DLCARDWELL
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D760314-1330
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761293/baaaeqxd.tel
Line Count: 101
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN IO
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ILO: PRESIDENCY OF MARITIME CONFERENCE
TAGS: PORG, ELAB, NO, JA, ILO, (HAREIDE)
To: BONN
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006